

# Paul Whitefield: 1953-2019

## Veteran newspaper editor

By CHRIS ERSKINE,  
LA TIMES COLUMNIST  
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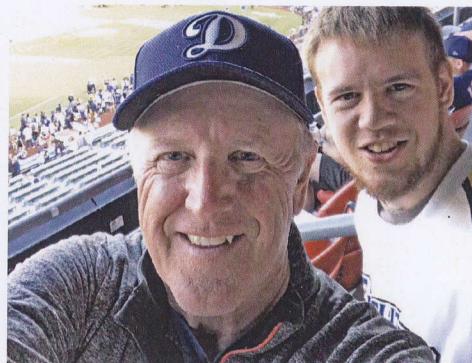
**P**aul Whitefield, a veteran editor at the Los Angeles Times who helped guide coverage of many of the paper's major stories over his 30-year career, died at home Aug. 14 after a five-year battle with esophageal cancer. He was 66.

A longtime resident of La Cañada Flintridge, he is survived by his wife, Sara Lessley, a former Page 1 editor at The Times, and their two sons, Sam and Ben Whitefield.

Paul Whitefield was a familiar figure around La Cañada for many years, supporting his sons' athletic careers in baseball and water polo. He was an avid fly fisherman, scratch golfer, huge car buff and a devoted Dodger fan and season ticket holder for many years.

As part of The Times' foreign staff, Whitefield oversaw copy editing and page design of some of the major stories of the day: most notably the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

He also helped produce the paper's weekly World Report section, which



**PAUL WHITEFIELD**, and his son, Sam, take in a ballgame. The senior Whitefield passed away Aug. 14.

*Courtesy of the Whitefield family*

professionalism during massive section "tear-ups" late in the evening, prompted by major late-breaking news.

"He was truly unflappable in dealing with breaking news on tough deadlines," said former colleague Jon Thurber. "That notion may seem quaint in the pre-digital era, but it's really true. He was a very good editor, very smart about news and, of course, didn't take himself too seriously."

One of Whitefield's most significant roles was as executive news editor of the paper's National Edition, a special compilation of political stories curated for Washington power brokers. The edition was delivered five days a week, landing on desks from the U.S. Capitol to the White House. For a while, he also helmed the paper's PM Final street edition.

John Paul Whitefield was born July 13, 1953

Distinguished Flying Cross, among other honors, for fighter missions on the P-47 Thunderbolt, which helped turn the air war over Europe.

Jane Whitefield was a corporal in the Women's Army Corp, and was reportedly in Paris the week after it was liberated.

His parents' contributions to their country triggered a love of military history in their son Paul, which he in turn shared with his sons on annual family road trips to battlefields and national monuments across the U.S.

After the war, Charles Whitefield became a pipeline welder, and the family — five children in all — moved frequently to follow the work, across Texas, Utah, Colorado, Minnesota and Nebraska.

Paul Whitefield graduated from high school in Fremont, Neb., and received a bachelor's degree

eventually teaching. He and his first wife, Debbie, moved to Pasadena in 1980, and Whitefield joined The Times' business section after a stint at the Santa Monica Evening Outlook.

At the time of his retirement in 2015, he oversaw copy editing and production of The Times' op-ed pages and was a frequent contributor of online humor pieces.

Other than spending time with his family, his favorite weekends were devoted to fly-fishing the Eastern Sierra with his brother Dave, particularly Hot Creek and Lake Mary in Mammoth Lakes.

In addition to his wife and sons, he is survived by a brother, Charles David Whitefield of Carson City, Nev., and sisters Kay Louise Story of San Antonio and Karol Ann Michelsen of Canadian, Texas. Another brother, Joe, died in a car crash in 1983.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to the National Parks Foundation, the Poynter Institute, Pro Publica, an investigative journalism site, or CalMatters, a nonprofit group that tracks state policy issues.

## OBITUARY

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He also helped produce the paper's weekly World Report section, which closely examined the tumultuous changes in Eastern Europe and the Middle East in the early '90s.

Colleagues at the paper remember him for his



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John Paul Whitefield was born July 13, 1953, in Ranger, Texas, to Jane and Charles Whitefield, a war hero who flew 74 missions over Germany during WWII.

Charles Whitefield was decorated with the

Distinguished Flying Cross, among other honors, for fighter missions on the P-47 Thunderbolt, which helped turn the air war over Europe.

Jane Whitefield was a corporal in the Women's Army Corp, and was reportedly in Paris the week after it was liberated.

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Paul Whitefield graduated from high school in Fremont, Neb., and received a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska in 1975. He then obtained a master's degree in international relations from the University of Hawaii and began work on a Ph.D there, with the goal of

Outlook.

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A celebration of his life will be held Sept. 15, at 11 a.m., at Cabot & Sons chapel, 27 Chestnut St., in Pasadena.

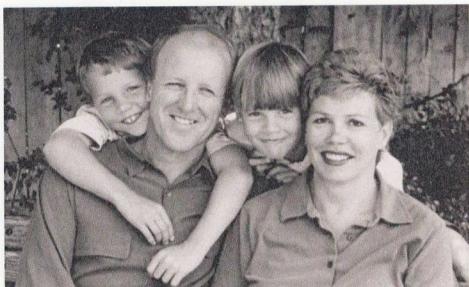
*Chris Erskine is a nationally known humor columnist and editor for the Los Angeles Times. He writes for the Sports, Travel and Saturday sections and edits on the paper's Features staff. As an editor, he has been a part of two Pulitzer Prize-winning teams at The Times (for his graphics work on the Northridge quake and the North Hollywood bank robbery). He is best known to readers for his weekly humor pieces on life in suburban Los Angeles. His latest book, "Daditude," released in 2018, is a collection of his favorite Times columns on fatherhood. He has written two other books, "Man of the House" and "Surviving Suburbia," which reached the Los Angeles Times bestseller list. The Chicago native has also worked for papers in New Orleans and Miami.*

# Dear Paul:

**T**hank you for a life of shared work, trips, kids, love and memories.

We met on the foreign desk of the LA Times, married at Descanso Gardens, honeymooned in Fiji.

We worked with smart, sassy colleagues at a prosperous, top-notch Times in incredibly newsy years: LA quakes, LA riots, the "fall of communism" (as you so often described to your sons), Atlanta Summer Olympics, Gulf Wars, elections and political upheaval. And of course there were the multiple Times editions you ran (and endured their demise, also).



We traveled together before our sons were born, then took Sam and Ben to Hawaii, Canada, Europe. And of course you drove us all over America several times each year as we checked out innumerable museums, battlefields, hikes, monuments, cultural events.

You agreed when I begged: "Oh, let's not go home yet.

Turn left here for Death Valley."

Could I have predicted that storm on our return?

You adored your sons (though early on, you *did* forget to feed Sam while I was at work, and you *did* let Ben ride down the stairs in his baby walker.)

You taught our boys how to hit, throw, catch, pitch, explore, build, to tell a story or joke, to laugh and to drive a stick shift (like you, they still refuse to own an automatic).

And of course, you inspired them to love your Dodgers. We're glad we three insisted you spend *lots* of money to attend a World Series game with each son in subsequent years.

We attended countless sporting events, and (not enough) classical music.

You golfed and golfed and later, you fished and fished and fished -- especially with your big-hearted brother Dave (and you never really understood why your active sons needed to "catch").



Even when you weren't feeling well, in recent years, you took overnight trips all over California so I could contribute to our dear LA Times travel section. And two years ago, you braved air travel to join me in England's overcast Lake District for our summer anniversary, where you drove (a stick, of course) so well on the "wrong side" of those narrow country roads.

You were quiet, stoic and stubborn with a quirky sense of humor. You went your own way, always.

I suspect you are looking at us now, really pleased you don't have to attend a party -- even if it is in your honor.

**Love, Sara**